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### Negotiating resistance with the character G in Naomi Izuka's Polaroid stories.

Konrad Ormand Davis Jr.

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""NGI QVKVPI RGUKVCEGWKJ TJ GCJ CTCEVGT G IP  
"NCQO KI\ WMC'UPQNCTQK SVQTKGU

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By

Konrad Ormand Davis Jr.

A.A., East Mississippi Community College, 2010

B.F.A., University Of Memphis, 2013

A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of the

College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Louisville

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Master of Fine Arts in Theatre Arts

Department of Theatre Arts

University of Louisville

Louisville, Kentucky

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August, 2016

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.....A Thesis Approved on

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June 3, 2016

.....by the following Thesis Committee:

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Professor Johnny Jones

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Dr. Hubert Baron Kelly

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Dr. Siobhan Smith

## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to anyone who has felt like giving up. This thesis is dedicated to the underdogs that have the potential but let's their past mistakes get in the way. Finally this thesis is dedicated to everyone in my family especially the generations after me.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*I would like to give a big shout out to Professor Johnnie Jones for guiding me on my journey throughout this thesis. I would also like to thank Professor Baron Kelly and Professor Siobhan Smith for assisting with my critical analysis and preparation for this final thesis project. I can't thank Professor Nefertiti Burton enough for seeing the passion and drive when no one else could. I know that I wouldn't be here without the help of Professor Lundena Thomas, Professor Rinda Frye, and of course my mentor Professor Lawrence Blackwell who influenced my decision for attending this graduate program. This degree is for my parents Johnny and Teresa Rush who have supported me physically, mentally, spiritually, emotionally and of course financially throughout the many years. Lastly, I have to thank my graduate cohort Byron Coolie, Candice Handy and Casey Moulton for always having my back.*

ABSTRACT

NGI QVKCVPI RGUKVCP EGY KJ VJ GCJ CTCEVGT G R NCQO KI\ WMC'U  
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Konrad O Davis Jr.

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This thesis will analyze my portrayal of G (Zeus) in *Polaroid Stories* by Naomi Izuka through my psychological journey as an actor. In my investigation of G, I will discuss the specific techniques used to create my performance in *Polaroid Stories*, which include influences from my Commedia, Improv, and ensemble training. I will examine the connection these tools acquired during my candidacy at the University of Louisville as well as real-life experiences that shaped my professional development as an artist and performer. In this thesis you will discover the influence of my early youth, my blackness, the artistic technique, and the mis-education of life experiences that shaped my artistic expression of G (Zeus). In finding G, I considered the following questions: When does the actor win? Does the actor sacrifice his artistic freedom or is there a level of resistance the actor can have? How does the artistic negotiation work between actor, director, and playwright? I found through my research that the artist does win through a negotiation with his/her ensemble, which can only be found once the artist is in control of his/her resistance.



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## IP VTQF WEVKQP

The primary goal for this thesis is to document my process for creating the character G in Naomi Izuka's <sup>1</sup>*Polaroid Stories*. It will also cover my overall development in the University of Louisville's Graduate Theatre Arts Program. I will closely analyze my portrayal of G and the techniques I used to capture his essence. My development as a theatre artist stems from training throughout the years of my undergraduate experience into my graduate career. My acting process focuses on the movement of the character and gesture work to get into a role. I will discuss how my use of improvisational work and physical background applied to this specific role. My improvisational work comes from my Second City training that I received during my undergraduate and graduate years of studying theatre. My character-building derives from my physical training comprised of Commedia Dell'arte and Anne Bogart's Viewpoints training. Those were the two types of actor-training that I have practiced over the course of my graduate studies. The work that most influenced my character-building was the time I spent using gestures to create a character. I used the Commedia archetypes as a guide for gesture to create G. I paired specific Viewpoint techniques focused on the kinesthetic response of my ensemble. This helped me create the world of the play for my character. The Viewpoints training uses a special vocabulary to construct movement for a performance and is usually formed from an improvised exploration. I approached my character development of G with these tools because of the mythical storytelling in

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<sup>1</sup> Lines and Quotes used throughout come from:  
Izuka, Naomi. *Polaroid Stories*. 28-31,54-56, 74-79.  
Published 1997 by Dramatic Publishing Company. Print

*Polaroid Stories*. This play mixes Greek mythology and fantasy with true stories from real people. The poetic structure lends itself to exploration for an actor that challenges him to play bigger physical and mental states. I had never played an older individual and wanted to try a new perspective for creating this character. I knew these tools worked in a more explorative approach and not from personal experience, which would force me to make bolder choices.

My time in the M.F.A. program has taught me to take risks and accept the consequences, whether good or bad. I have fought adversity many times during my graduate experience and always overcame any obstacle. This has helped me identify my personal flaws and continue to strengthen my artistic approach for a professional career. My character G in *Polaroid Stories* faces some of the same issues that I have dealt with. G is in search for his own identity and I applied my own experience to fully engage my character development. G struggles with organization, romantic relationships, and the social stigma that he cannot progress. G and I have both let past mistakes influence decisions about the way we maneuver through life, and I will explain how that affected my process. Some of the issues I will discuss include the lack of organization, time management, ownership, and trust, which shaped my life and helped me to cultivate a relationship with the character. My lack of organization started during my high school career and followed me through my graduate career. My time management still needs work but is continuing to improve the older I get. I now fully understand my creative ownership and the idea of trusting others to accomplish a goal. This thesis documents my overall arc of experiences that have molded me into the artist I am today. I have experienced some negative repercussions as well as positive acknowledgments by my

peers and professors throughout this process. These experiences include losing scholarships, recommendation offers, and having to prove to others that I have the capabilities to be a professional artist.

This thesis will specifically analyze a few discoveries I made about my artistic process during the rehearsal and performance of *Polaroid Stories*. I write this thesis for those who need encouragement to make it as an artist but also for myself to reflect on my personal journey. I experienced many breakthroughs during this process that can motivate others in a similar situation to find the good in any circumstance through the art of negotiation. As a theatre artist, negotiation plays a big part in creating a production. I would not be the artist I am today if I did not learn how to negotiate my artistic expression. This starts with listening and sharing with the ensemble of actors as well as the director. For this specific role, I reevaluated many of my strengths and weaknesses, vocal technique, and physical embodiment for the role of G. Although these are techniques to approach the role, I also had to assess my professionalism regarding rehearsal and class preparation. The application of my training along with improving my professional standards would cultivate my character for my thesis role. Professor Laura Early, the director, saw potential for the character G in my audition and sought to help me develop one of the biggest roles in my academic career. This started a negotiation of different opinions made between the director, ensemble and myself that would be the success needed for our production of *Polaroid Stories*.

In my analysis of my progression as G, I recognized ideas about artistic negotiation that actors deal with every time they perform onstage. I believe that the actor is a puppet for the director's vision and the playwright is the creator of the puppet's

performance. A puppet is usually controlled by strings and guided by a puppeteer, but the strings do not limit what the puppet can do. The actor is not necessarily controlled but coached into finding actions and personal discoveries by his or her director. The director sees a vision and the actor brings it to life. This was my belief before starting this thesis project, but I learned that it is collaboration rather than a struggle for control. Actors come into an audition with their image and talent, and it is up to the director to see if the actor fits into their version of the play. Although playwrights are hardly ever in the room to negotiate, their voices are the foundation for the production. Despite a few instances where playwrights come in to negotiate their original vision, the biggest negotiation from my perspective is between the actor and the director. In other words, without the playwright there would be nothing for the director to envision for the actor to play. There are some plays without a script that rely on ensemble-based devising, but even those performances have some leader in the creative process that deals with negotiation. It is very important to recognize the power of ensemble and the hierarchy within your ensemble, whether you are the playwright, director, or the actor. These three members all form a collective to produce a successful performance. In my thesis, I will discuss the circumstances that arose in my particular situation that highlights this negotiation process. I was offered different parameters that were set by the playwright but artistically influenced by the director, which led to certain choices.

Lastly, I aim to highlight how this process gave me an advanced understanding of resistance as an artist and actor. I understand resistance as the action between different sides sometimes pulling away or pushing towards an end result. I used to think resistance always meant fighting or doing something negative. However, resistance can be seen

from different perspectives whether moving toward a positive or negative goal. The actor usually has some form of resistance when negotiating with the director and playwright's original vision. I want to highlight how one can negotiate his resistance and achieve individual expression by knowing what he or she can bring to the table that will propel the production forward. I will explore these topics as they relate to my experience as G in *Polaroid Stories*.

SGEVKQP OPG

BNCEMPQNCTQK

<sup>2</sup>*Suzan Lori Parks: A black play has black actors. A black play gives us a role to play and, when someone steps into that role, the rest of us got someone like us to look at.*

### **Black Identity**

In order to understand my process that created G, I have to explain my cultural identity and how it relates to the world of the play. I identify myself as a black or African-American male, which means I was born in America and I am a descendant of African ancestors. It is the job of the actor to identify the traits of their character in order to portray the role and have a successful performance. This is obtained when actors can recognize the differences between their own traits and how it can or cannot relate to their character. Thus, my black identity helped me during my performance process and shaped how I approached the role of G in *Polaroid Stories*.

In her essay “New Black Math”, Suzan Lori Parks explores the age-old question, “What is a black play?” This thought went through my mind as I decided to pursue a role for my thesis. I honestly did not want to perform a black role for my thesis because I was black. I felt that as a black artist I am expected to perform in a black play, because the roles are written specifically for a black person. I thought if I did a play that was not written or intended for a black character it would showcase more range and growth. However, in our discussion of Parks’s essay in my Approaching African American Theatre class, I reconsidered the multiple characteristics that can define a black play.

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<sup>2</sup> Parks, Suzan-Lori. “New Black Math.” *Theatre Journal* 57.4 (2005): 576–83

Furthermore, I learned to associate resistance with my black identity, but that does not define every black person. Resistance has multiple sides and does not simply mean rejection when it comes to black identity.

In *Polaroid Stories*, I was colorblind cast, but I my identification as a black male created a physical black presence in the play. This was a director's choice, but I felt like the play already had a black presence before being cast. The black presence is identified by the surroundings of how I interpreted the stories in the play. My interpretation lends itself to highlight issues that are related to my blackness. Resistance is tied to black performance because it highlights black people's struggle against an opposing side. Black minstrels were exaggerated performances that channeled stereotypical black characters that spoke in broken English, sang and danced before audiences (Young 5). Black minstrels were created by Thomas D. Rice and made into an international phenomenon (Young 4). Thomas D. Rice was a white man that developed his technique from an African American street performer with a physical disability. Rice was not interested in depicting real qualities of African American life but pushed agendas of negative racial stereotypes.

In an effort to resist these stereotypes, Bert Williams and George W. Walker sought to redefine the exaggerated performances. These two African American men decided to perform in blackface to make these characters recognizable to black audiences (Young 7). Walker and Williams created a theory and practice of black performance, which began as a re-appropriation then evolved into an innovative approach to black representation (Ndounou 64). Thus, black performance was created from resistance and used to educate others by showcasing an authentic side of black performance and



identity. W.E.B. Du Bois would later supported this black theatre movement by insisting that theatre artists have an obligation to present the concerns of black folk on stage and in their writing (Young 7). I state this because I feel that it is my duty to represent my cultural background on stage. Du Bois felt like theatre should reflect the embodied experience of being black (Young 7). I made a conscious effort to consider this when I was working on this thesis project because it was important to me as a black artist to keep this mentality.

How did my blackness relate to *Polaroid Stories*? My blackness related to *Polaroid Stories* because of the ideas expressed and the similar relations to my personal black experience. This play challenges audiences to see a different side of homeless individuals and reconsider stereotypes they might have. I can identify with this story by finding the similarities of my character G and his situation compared to mine. Through this connection, my black experience is evoked through my portrayal of the G onstage.

### **Who is the Playwright?**

The playwright Naomi Izuka is not a black or white playwright. She is a minority of Japanese and Latin descent and has a writing history influenced by her multicultural background. *Polaroid Stories* follows the journey of homeless individuals that are affected by drugs, prostitution, and lies. Izuka blends Greek mythology derived from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* with interviews of real people to capture the mystical essence of their lives for an audience. Her interpretation of having the gods reinvented into homeless people offers a more human perspective to expose their issues and their lack of power to control what is going on in their lives. The stories are only snippets of what is going on and are not necessarily facts for the audience to follow. It is up to the audience to

interpret what is real and what is not. Every character has his or her story to escape the reality of their life to receive empathy or judgment from society. By the end of the play, the audience is left with a new image of the lives of homeless individuals through the lens Izuka presents.

### **My Black Lens**

The characters in *Polaroid Stories* face stereotypes and are judged by their appearance rather than their character. The narrative of these individuals challenge the world to look at how society approaches people that are less fortunate and the stigma that has been developed. The stigmas we associate with being homeless are not categorized into one box just like you cannot categorize being black. Everybody has their story and these individuals face each situation differently from the other. These characters share some qualities of the black experience but are not identical to the struggle associated with blacks in America. The black lens that I use looks at someone else's situation to identify their needs and reconstruct society's opinion. Performance is an outlet that black people used to fight stigmas and create change for the better.

My blackness is a story that needs to be heard just like the characters in this story. I see how their stories are related to the black community I grew up in. The black community that I grew up in had domestic violence and drug problems. I see this play as a black play because of the nature of different topics regardless of ambiguous race. I do not have to be homeless to empathize with the homeless because my personal background includes a few of the same issues as some of the characters' stories. I was exposed to drugs, domestic violence, and impoverished conditions at a very young age. I, however, did not proceed to use or become a victim of drug addiction, violence, or allow

my poverty to define me. These are a few of the conditions that some people live in whether homeless or not. I relate this to a black history of resistance because Izuka is redefining homeless stereotypes. This can be considered a black play, because of Du Bois's theory of what Negro theatre must be. Du Bois states that Negro Theatre has to be "about us", "by us", "for us", and "near us" (Du Bois 7). This play is about black people because of the situations and how these characters interact in a world where they are treated unequally. This play is by us because Izuka is a minority. This play is for us to see how we can redefine our blackness against stereotypes. This play is near us because it has the potential to reach a multicultural audience. This is my view of *Polaroid Stories* as it relates to black performance.

The director, Laura Early, decided to set *Polaroid Stories* between the 1970s and 1980s for our production. These individual stories jump from year to year but over time form a coherent plot line. Professor Early's interpretation was formed from the use of drugs, music, and language described in the script. Crack cocaine was very popular in the 1980s and was called one of the "most addictive drugs on earth" in the article, "Mike Agar: The story of crack" (Curtis 39). This article specifically targeted the black community's drug use. In *Polaroid Stories*, we chose to engulf the world of the play with other addictions including heroin, alcohol, and marijuana. I personally have never dealt with crack or heroin, but I can recall times that I have seen users, including some of my friends use drugs. My first time seeing someone use crack surprised me. I was caught off guard when the individual pulled out a dollar and rolled it up thinly to snort the rock. I have always seen people in my family abuse alcohol and I know the actions behind that abuse. This was not reflective of all the black communities at the time but had a major

influence in some communities. The director stressed the use of drugs in this time period and asked us to consider what it was like to be surrounded by the influence.

Relationships were the focus of many interactions in the play. Some of the characters had drug relationships, violent relationships, and dealt with mental problems that affected their personal well being. My character dealt with three women of different ethnicities throughout the play. His three different relationships showed his progression of emotions and goals throughout the story. The three ethnicities were mainly a director's choice but had significant meaning that I will explain in my "Finding G" section. The director kept in mind how each relationship would affect the audience and the message behind it when casting. My character deals with each one differently as the story goes along. Professor Early thought about this when casting. My character undergoes different situations of power and sometimes he is more submissive. It is common for men to feel the need to take care of their family or be in a position of power. My character G, also known as Zeus, promises every woman he meets that he will provide for them. This can be related to Greek mythology of Zeus being a womanizer. Like Zeus, G wanted them for a short time and decided who he chose to help throughout his life's journey. However, G has their best interest at heart but does not have the financial backing to help them escape drug addiction or gain a healthier lifestyle. I associated the idea of resistance with G's story because I am approaching the role from a black man's perspective. I had to consider how this affected my character's relationship to other characters when researching the role. I had to be conscious of the time period as well as the setting of the play.

<sup>3</sup>*Frank Herbert: Keep Cool: anger is not an argument.*

### **Defining Negotiation**

When I think of negotiation, I think of collaboration and the presences of ideas. These ideas are creative outlets for artists to express themselves. I consider myself an artist before an actor because as an artist I am not bound or defined by one thing. This idea of being labeled has played a big role in my life and something I have never really enjoyed. I have never really liked being labeled as one thing because then people seem to only see that. The only label I seem to be okay with is being black. Society has a way of keeping you in a box and judging your every move by your identity. How I identify myself is not only important to me; it is crucial to acting onstage. As an artist you must be well aware of how you present yourself. This brings me to the art of negotiation.

Most artists have to go through this at some point in life when creating their art. Actors are probably one of the top groups of artists that go through this daily. Actors are constantly being asked to transform into something that they are not. Of course, it is the actor's choice to be put in this position but it is through negotiation that the transformation is successfully achieved. The actor has to be open to working with the rest of the ensemble and within a director's vision. Although most people understand resistance as an action that negates another action, this does not mean that one side is right or wrong. Both sides have opposing goals or interests. Actors go through this

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<sup>3</sup> Demakis, Joseph. *The Ultimate Book of Quotations*.  
Published Nov. 2012 by CreateSpace. Print

negotiation process every time they go into an audition or rehearsal. An actor can still have a successful career but their resistance cannot be stubborn.

In Peter Brook's essay, "Deadly Theatre", he states: "Actors may sometimes seem jealous or trivial, yet I have never known an actor who did not want to work" (28).

Brook's statement reflects the need for an actor to be onstage and their willingness to achieve that goal. As actors, we all have moral, artistic value and want the respect of every director when working on a performance. Every actor has a choice about what show or production they want to be a part of. I had to do a lot of maturing before and during my graduate experience that taught me how to work with different directors.

Every director has their particular style in which they work with their group of actors.

Professor Early's style of directing was centered on ensemble work. An actor's dream is to work with a director that enables you to voice your opinion about certain choices for your character.

### **Influences Of My Art**

There are a few practitioners and theorists who have influenced my mission as an actor/artist as it relates to my thesis role. Du Bois speaks to the way I want to use my art today. In his essay, "Criteria of Negro Art", he emphasizes that art should be used to educate others about issues that need to be addressed (Du Bois, 103). Thus, when I think about my role as G I want the audience to question their ideas of homeless people.

Everyone may not grasp the same idea but my performance will evoke a conversation about homeless people and their view of this specific class. Most artists have motives that affect the way their art is received by spectators. I never want my art to be unjustified or

meaningless. I want to use my theatrical skills to help audiences see the world differently. This type of reaction from the audience is motivated by imagination which brings me to the method style of acting. This is a technique I studied during my graduate years of studies and was implemented in my discovery of G.

In *Actor Training*, edited by Alison Hodge, David Krasner gave a background of the method acting technique. Krasner spoke specifically about Stella Adler, and points out how she stressed that the actor should use the given circumstances of the play rather than their own personal experience. The experiences in my life can influence my imagination but should not be a replica of that experience on stage. If an actor recalls their own experience onstage then he/she will not be actively open to their partner or the character's given circumstance. The use of imagination is unique because it is different for everyone and allows the actor to express himself freely (Krasner 157-159). There are many acting techniques but the model for this production was based heavily on ensemble relationships. This type of training would be influenced by the director and my research on ensemble collaboration.

SITI Company is a physical ensemble-based theatre company that was founded by Anne Bogart and Tadashi Suzuki. The training of this theatre company focuses on new productions, ensemble training, and creating opportunities for artistic dialogue and cultural exchange. Their company uses Bogart's Viewpoints and Tadashi's Grammar of the Feet to train actors to devise pieces of work that seek to explore unique theatrical experiences. These experiences come from a spontaneity and kinesthetic response to their partners on stage when developing a performance (Climenhaga 290). This was helpful when working on *Polaroid Stories* because this company relies on kinesthetic response. It

is never about one person but how the ensemble supports each character's story. I never felt like this thesis project was my solo role but the overall development of the ensemble. This type of relationship was a direct link to how SITI Company trains their actors.

The SITI Company practices ensemble training and development, which was helpful in my thesis project. We used exercises that were influenced by Viewpoints to recreate environments in the play. I relied on my ensemble's energy to inform my character development and to create the world of the play. I know that a good show is not about one actor being the best but the cohesiveness of the ensemble. The artistic practices of the SITI Company artists all revolve around a sense of ensemble and negotiating choices for a performance.

I particularly consider Du Bois's theory every time I audition for a production because I am a reflection of my culture. The techniques and training of Adler is what got me through my thesis performance each night. The power of imagination and engaging in my environment captures my character's sense of direction. The core values of the SITI Company are what I hope to achieve with my own company one day. This reinforces my idea of how important the artistic negotiation is to the actor, director, and playwright. There has to be a general commonality between these artists in order to produce a well-rounded show.



<sup>4</sup>*Colin Powell: You don't know what you can get away with until you try.*

### **First Experience**

In order to dissect the negotiation of the artist, I will pinpoint the origin of my artistic expression and the experiences that evoked resistance. Most of my habits derived from my youth and my mis-education in the academic setting. I will start by describing my first experience performing for a live audience. It was the summer of 1995 in St. Louis, Missouri at the Ivy Family Reunion. My mom signed me up for the talent showcase. I was five years old and was nervous about performing in front of an audience for the first time. I was a very shy child when I was growing up and very soft-spoken when I did speak. Although I lacked a father figure, my mother provided strong parental guidance. She would do her best to get me involved with the church and other activities to surround me with great male role models.

This family reunion was the first time since my parents' divorce that the family would see us without my dad. She definitely wanted me to participate so that everything seemed normal. At the time I did not understand too many things and I usually remained silent. My mother asked me a week before the showcase if I wanted to perform and I just shrugged my shoulders like I did not care. She told me the whole family would be performing and it would be fun, but I had no idea what I wanted to do. She suggested that I choose my favorite song, which was "Take Me out to the Ball Game" at the time, and

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<sup>4</sup> Harari, Oren. *The Leadership Secrets of Colin Powell*.  
Published 2002 by McGraw-Hill . Print

sing it for the family. I was so ecstatic because that was one of my favorite songs in school and we sung it all the time in class. My mother, however, told me that if I were to perform it that it would be a solo performance. I asked if she could perform with me and she told me that she was already performing in the showcase with my aunts. I told her that I did not want to do it by myself, but she encouraged me that it would be just like performing it in front of her at home. I ended up agreeing to do the performance and I still remember the butterflies I had that night when the speaker called my name. I walked up to the microphone slowly, but froze when I got up there. The room was so quiet and everyone was just looking at me, waiting to see what this little boy was going to do.

My mom walked up to the stage and told me to say my name as well as what I was performing. After a moment of silence, I took a deep breath and performed the song. I still remember how the crowd started to participate as I was singing and I got a rush of adrenaline that would manifest into my addiction for attention. When I finished, the audience stood up and gave a standing ovation, which made me feel really good. As I went to go sit down, I started to think when I would get another opportunity to perform again.

My cousins were about to go on stage next and do a dance routine. I asked my mom if I could perform with them and she told me that I could not because I did not practice with them. I sat there for a second, disappointed because it would be a while before I got another opportunity to perform onstage. I knew that in order to feel that feeling again that I needed to be on that stage. The music started, and I rushed onstage before anybody could stop me. The family had no idea that I was not supposed to be up there during their performance and no one stopped the music to tell them. My cousins

were shocked but had to keep performing because they were already dancing. I just tried my best to mimic their movements, which was harder than I expected. After we finished, the crowd clapped again and cheered for us as we took a bow. My mother, however, was not very pleased and made me apologize later to my cousins for disrupting their performance.

This story is significant to my artistic development, because from that day forward I was hooked on getting the attention or response from an audience. This type of response or level of acceptance has haunted me and shaped how I view my level of success. The artist must be open and willing to resist these urges so that it does not affect the performance or ensemble space.

### **Finding My Calling**

As an artist we all seek confirmation and that was what I received at my family reunion. This feeling would spark a rollercoaster of decisions that would impact my academic career as well as artistic. I began exploring all the facets of what it means to be an artist and engaging in different extracurricular activities. The real turning point was high school and specifically my involvement with the school's show choir, marching band, and becoming the mascot. My confidence in high school would result in my selfishness as an artist and build up my resistance to discipline. This resistance was a ripple effect from the "no" my mother gave me about performing with my cousins at the family reunion. I got into a habit of not allowing anyone to say I cannot be apart or have the talent to do something. This habit would continue to recur throughout my performance career. I figured that people enjoyed watching me perform so I should continue to do it. The extracurricular activities in high school helped showcase my talent

and continued to fuel the need for attention. I became known for my own unique ability to use my expression to entertain others. I competed in high school show choir and chorus competitions that would later develop my vocal abilities. I also learned how to play the trumpet, baritone, and the tuba in my high school band program. These abilities, however, did not satisfy my artistic hunger and were later left alone. It was not until I got the chance to be mascot that I truly found my calling for the stage.

A mascot is not typically on a traditional theatre stage, but the task is highly recognized for its performance and engagement with the audience. As the mascot, I trained over the summer with a cheer camp and got my first lesson in character development and how to have a larger than life persona for an audience. There are three main elements in being a successful mascot that would later translate to my theatrical training. The first is developing a character persona, which includes physical movement and gestures. Mascots are not allowed to talk because their supposed to be approachable for any age group. Most kids are afraid of mascots because of their size and their stagnant face. The second element would be intentions and always having a purpose of why your character is doing something. Lastly, presence would be the number one thing every mascot needed to keep the audience engaged. I had no idea that I was already learning theatre techniques before I thought about a career in theatre.

### **The Mis-Education**

The mis-education started when I began to participate in several extracurricular groups after school, which limited my time for studying. I started to devote all of my time and energy to my creative expression and put my education on the backburner. This habit would follow me for the rest of my academic career. I wanted to be the popular guy at

school that knew everybody and was heavily involved. I accomplished this dream at the expense of my academic potential because my priorities were in the wrong place. I ended up graduating high school with a 2.3 grade-point-average and was not awarded any scholarships for college. I decided to go to East Mississippi Community College (EMCC) to boost my G.P.A. before transferring to a four-year college.

My priorities changed once I enrolled at EMCC, and I began focusing on my grades rather than other activities. This was a step in the right direction because before now I was so busy with extracurricular things that I did not prioritize my studies. At EMCC, I gained respect from my colleagues as well as my professors from my classroom work performance rather than my artistic expression. This gave me a newfound confidence that highlighted my academia work rather than just my artistic talent. I still wanted to major in a performance-related field, preferably dance, but knew that it would not pay the bills in the long run. I started to consider majoring in education to become a teacher. During my last semester at EMCC, I took a theatre class and fell in love. I would then reconsider my path of an artistic career versus a traditional path. I ended up auditioning for a theatre scholarship at the University of Memphis (U of M) and received a full scholarship along with honor scholarships for my grades.

I continued my academic career at The University of Memphis as a transfer student, which was not easy coming into a Bachelors of Fine Arts program. I only had one semester of theatre and basically came in with the knowledge of a novice. I felt so intimidated on the first day, because I was coming into a class that had already built an ensemble throughout their first years. The professors tried to be supportive, but they felt that I should have known a lot more about theatre before starting. This made me self-

conscious inside and outside of the classroom with my colleagues. I was so used to being the center of attention and being that dramatic cool guy at my other school. I almost reconsidered if I wanted to stay in the program and started to think about other possible majors instead of theatre. I never wanted to major in theatre or acting before this and felt out of place in the theatre department. That first semester would be my downfall in the theatre department and start a cycle of detrimental choices that would affect my undergraduate degree. Although I came to this program with a newfound confidence in pursuing the arts, I did not know the hard work it would take to achieve my artistic dream. My grades were not my priority, because I was distracted by new friends, artistic endeavors (dance), and personal love interests. During my first semester, I got cast as an ensemble member for *Comedy of Errors* by William Shakespeare. Although the director was very ecstatic about working with me, I was disappointed about being cast as an ensemble member, especially since I was a full scholarship recipient. My colleagues assured me that most freshmen or transfer students never got a lead in their first play. I decided to swallow my pride and get ready to be a team player. The director gave us a rigorous schedule and told us to never be late. I quickly learned the hard way that theatre artists take being on time very seriously. I was late on the day of first rehearsal by five minutes and the stage manager told me to not let it happen again. I agreed that it would not, but a few rehearsals went by and I was late again after returning back from fall break. I had gone to go visit my mom in Mississippi, which was three hours away and traffic held me up once I reached Memphis. The director spoke to me that night on how important it was for me to be on time and again I assured him that it would not happen again. The final straw happened the next week when I overslept and missed a rehearsal

completely. I was still adjusting from my experience at EMCC and being at a university, which was a totally different experience. He called me that night and left a voice message saying that he wanted to meet in his office the next day at two. I missed that appointment and received a phone call the next day saying that I was kicked out of the show. This was a situation that was not supposed to happen, especially to someone on a full theatre scholarship. I was put on probation after my first semester and would almost lose my scholarship because of my lack of professionalism. When I look back on this situation I realized that my resistance is not about an oppressive power that is holding me down but about my failure to negotiate. Balance can only happen if the artist is willing to be open to collaboration. The actor has to be a positive vessel for his ensemble and for the director. After this difficult circumstance, I tried to reestablish my commitment and eagerness to learn but my professors started to see bad habits form and lost interest in the promise of my success in the real world. My B.F.A. program's mission was to mold professional artists that would be ready to go out into the world to pursue a career in acting post-graduation, and I was not meeting their standards.

I continued my course of studies in the program, barely receiving performance credit each semester until graduation. During my final year I was not mentally prepared for graduation, because I had not learned from my mistakes. I still continued to be unprofessional when it came to my work and acting craft. I was so far removed from acting that I could not explain my acting technique. I was still showing up late to rehearsals as well as not being prepared in class. This could have been an influence of my rebellious attitude or the lack of commitment to learning the techniques that were being taught. I never applied myself fully to any task unless it was something that I wanted to

do. This form of resistance was hurting the success of my undergraduate career. For me, this meant that I would not get cast in any productions because of lack of eagerness to cooperate. If artists put themselves in a position to not be open or negotiable to prospective jobs then their window of opportunity will remain small.

These are things that I struggled with as I continued my graduate journey at the University of Louisville. I knew upon graduating from my B.F.A program that I needed more training before entering the career path of a working actor. I knew that in order to be a better artist that I needed to learn professionalism and change my history of how I conducted myself with other artists.

Professionalism used to be something that I found myself resisting in any shape, form, or fashion. This skill had always made me feel like I was bound to act or present myself in a certain manner. As an artist, I just wanted the freedom to express myself and I felt that professionalism only pertained to other job markets like business. However, I had to learn that professionalism is necessary for any type of work and as an artist I am not exempt from this responsibility. Negotiation is the key to any successful production because nothing can be accomplished alone or by one person's selfish attitude. Everything discussed in this chapter has shaped my process as an actor while also pointing out my weaknesses as professional.



**Furthering My Technique**

I started the University of Louisville's Theatre Arts Department graduate program with a loose grasp of historical theatre knowledge and an intermediate level of acting. I chose this program to enhance my skills and develop the confidence to pursue acting as a career. The University of Louisville's Theatre Arts Department was smaller than my undergraduate program, which meant more attention in the classroom and more opportunities to be onstage. This helped me focus more on retaining the information in class because I was held accountable in a smaller setting.

The professors did not allow for any class work or performance projects to be turned in late. The level of professionalism was always expected and had dire consequences if they were not fulfilled. I had a lot of maturing to do while transitioning from undergraduate to graduate school. I had to completely transform from unorganized undergraduate student to a professional graduate student.

Time management was just a small factor in recognizing my flaws as an artist. My vocal instrument lacked in articulation and my dialect affected my character work. I thought I had grasped articulation and controlling my regional accent in undergrad but that was not the case. I used *Freeing the Natural Voice* by Kristin Linklater to analyze my voice and to think about how my character sounds in comparison to my neutral voice. During my rehearsal process, I read over chapter nineteen that discussed the importance of articulating the voice. The importance of stretching my lips and jaws would help articulate my character's voice on stage. This was all helpful information I found and

would share with my ensemble while doing warm-ups (Linklater 295-299). I noticed during rehearsal that I also needed to work on my vocal resonance as an actor. The three main vocal resonators for vocal development that I used included the teeth, mouth, and chest sections of the body. I tended to breathe from my chest but never use my chest voice on stage. My voice usually comes from my teeth box instead of my core, which affected the way I breathe onstage. As an actor, I have to be aware of my breath so that I can breathe from the character's breath instead of my own breath. The voice that comes from your teeth is usually softer when compared to a deep chest voice. The mouth is usually a medium-toned voice that is usually thrown forward through the lips of your mouth. Voice is only one part of the transformation of developing a character and I was not able to recognize this difference before entering the program (Linklater 187-190).

Despite my shortcomings in voice, I did have a lot of physical work, which was one of my strengths. Along with my involvement with the dance department in undergrad, I also participated in other physical movement activities on campus, such as dance team, stepping, choreography, and stage combat club. I loved using my body to dance and gesture for performance showcases. Physical movement has always come very natural to me in performance and was my vehicle for character development. During my graduate studies, I discovered how to fully use the techniques I have learned and apply them to my acting process. My commedia and improvisational work is more self-expressive and was used in the process of creating G, as you will read later.

### **Choosing My Thesis**

The thesis process is all about negotiating my performance of a role in a play chosen by the director. My process began with proposing different plays to directors for a

thesis role during my second year as a graduate student. I knew that I wanted to do a play that was going to stretch me as an actor and a role that I had never performed. I have always been cast as the young adolescent or the main character's accomplice in every play throughout my acting career. I wanted my thesis role to be the lead character so that I could carry the weight of the show. I had chosen a few plays but none of the faculty felt that the plays complemented the department's goal or the available students. I got to a point where I felt that my voice was not being taken seriously and that the faculty cared more about their own choices rather than my wants or needs. Conversations like these made me shut down and stop proposing ideas for my thesis role. This idea of submitting proposals to negotiate a season for the fall was clearly out of my hands, so I chose to focus on coursework.

At the time, we were rehearsing our final performance for my graduate acting class and our scenes were from *Polaroid Stories*. My character was Narcissus, based on the Greek myth of a young male that falls in love with himself because of a spell. He then rejects everyone because they will never compare to his standards. Izuka's Narcissus was a homeless homosexual male that escorted to make money and obtain the things he wanted. I started to identify with this character after studying the scene and working on it in class. Daniel Hill, my professor at the time, thought it would be a good play to propose for the upcoming season. I started to get excited because I wanted to explore this character deeper than my one scene. I started to see Narcissus as a good thesis role and another classmate saw a role for himself from our final performance, too. We then agreed with Daniel Hill to propose *Polaroid Stories* at the next faculty meeting. The faculty accepted it after he discussed our enthusiasm for the roles and his vision for directing it.

## **The Turning Point**

After finding out the news that this would be a selection for the upcoming season, I decided to meet with Daniel Hill about preparing for the role. Daniel asked me to study the play during the summer break and start thinking about topics that I would like to write about. Narcissus was a character that struggled with sexuality, and I thought it could be a stretch for me as an actor to play a gay character. I have always wanted to play a gay character but not in a stereotypical way. The topic of gender roles in Greek Mythology would have been a great topic, but before I could even start to do research I found out that Daniel Hill would not be returning in the fall to direct *Polaroid Stories*. I was devastated because this would change my whole project and require me to start from scratch to pursue my thesis role. Although my department chair, Dr. Nefertiti Burton, assured me that everything would be okay I had already started to reconsider a different thesis project. I did not want to be stuck with any role and some random director so I thought about auditioning for *The Piano Lesson* by August Wilson. This play would be directed by Dr. Baron Kelly and also included other thesis roles for my classmates. I began to research the roles in *The Piano Lesson* and decided on auditioning for Boy Willie. Professor Burton emailed that *Polaroid Stories* would still be in the season just under a new director. I was skeptical because the director would be someone I did not know personally and may not see the same vision for the play that Daniel had discussed with me. I spoke with my head advisor about my decision to audition for both plays in the fall in hopes of being chosen by the director who saw me in their production. The next step was to read both plays and start to prepare for auditions.

## **Auditions**

It was the first week of school and auditions were later that week. I went to speak with both directors before the audition. I told them that I was reconsidering my thesis role and would like their help in deciding which show to be in. I took it upon myself to work on negotiating what seemed best for both directors' vision for the show. I still wanted to be Narcissus in *Polaroid Stories* and Boy Willie in the *Piano Lesson*. I learned monologues for both shows for these characters and presented them to the directors at the auditions. However, I received callbacks for both shows for characters I never intended to play. The idea of coming in and having a set vision of what role I want would now have to be reconsidered. Professor Kelly asked me to look at the sides for Avery and Professor Early told me to look at G. Avery is a minister in *The Piano Lesson* and would have required me to shave my head for the role. Shaving my head for any role was out of the question but finding a production to be in was my main concern. I have seen professional actors change their hair for a role, but I did not feel obligated to do this for my thesis. I also felt like my hair was a big part of who I was, and I did not want to drastically change my image. I felt like so much of my time as a young artist has been keeping my own persona away from characters that I play onstage. I have heard so many times from my professors that shaving my head would get me more roles, but of course I did not believe them. This was just another example of me wanting to learn from my own mistakes rather than listen to someone who has experienced it. I knew that for a role in *Polaroid Stories*, the director would be open to casting individuals with different styles. I knew that G was an older man dealing with some type of addiction and that there was a chance I would not have to cut my hair. I had no inclination of playing Avery in *The Piano Lesson* for my thesis role, but I saw an interesting opportunity to play G in *Polaroid Stories*. Avery

would have been an older man too but did not have the creative wiggle room to become anything more than a stylized black man in a period play. G, however, was still a mystery not only to me but for the director in the auditions. This type of freedom to explore a new character type and possible drug usage would raise my interest dramatically. I decided to meet with Professor Early during her office hours to discuss her vision for the play. She did not really see me in her version as Narcissus and would like me to consider the role of G. That night I went to callbacks for both plays and found out the next day that I was cast as G. This new role would alter my performance and my writing subject for my thesis.

I accepted the role because I did not have any other choice for other roles in the season. I knew that I would like to start my thesis in the fall and not wait until spring. *Polaroid Stories* and *The Piano Lesson* were my only shot at doing a thesis performance in the fall showcase. I was very nervous about doing my thesis role with a director that had never directed someone for a thesis role. I was not alone, though, because my other classmate was doing his thesis project with Professor Early, too. I decided to take a chance and try my best to bring Professor Early's vision to life. *Polaroid Stories* was not my ideal choice for a thesis role, but it turned out to be one of the greatest experiences in my artistic and professional career. I feel like everything happens for a reason and God has it all planned out for you to learn something.

### **The Next Step**

As far as preparing for my role in *Polaroid Stories*, all the character research I had done for Narcissus was now useless. I had to start to look at the character G and his overall presence in the play. I could still use my acting techniques that I had acquired during my time at the University of Louisville. However, I would now look at Professor

Early to critique my performance of my thesis and sharpen my skills as an actor. I knew that it would be up to me to come in with some type of character work and intentions by the first rehearsal. This would require me to continue to read the play a few more times and consider why G is necessary to the story. I wanted to be off book by the first rehearsal but Laura assured me that my creation of G needed to be organic and not rehearsed. I decided to do as much research and study of G before rehearsal so the process of finding G would be easier. I know this process was going to be very different, but I was ready. This thesis project would be the hardest that I have ever worked on developing a character as well as writing a paper to analyze my process. I was prepared physically to do the work for developing G, but mentally unaware of how difficult it would be.

<sup>5</sup> *John Wooden: Success is peace of mind which is a direct result of self-satisfaction in knowing you made the effort to become the best of which you are capable*

### **The Pyramid of Negotiation**

The negotiation starts with the director, the actor, and the ensemble. The director is at the top of the pyramid and usually has the final say about a creative choice. Actors are always obliged to present different choices to the director and the ensemble. The ensemble has to also agree to work with the choices the actor gives. If something is not working for the director or the actor's ensemble it may need a revision. The director has the power to change the vision for any production with certain limits and mold the full ensemble to complete this vision. The director can only accomplish this vision with the help of his/her actors and has to recognize when the resistance of both parties is not effective. The director cannot be a tyrant when it comes to decision-making and has to be open to different concerns regarding the ensemble. The ensemble has to be open for criticism to improve their performance. Thus, the director, the actor and full ensemble are all key players in the negotiation process of defining the vision of a production. The status of power in the pyramid is about negotiating that decision and being open to reevaluating different choices.

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<sup>5</sup> Wooden, John and Jamison, Steve. *Wooden On Leadership*.  
Published 2005 by McGraw-Hill. Print



In my process of finding the character G, I discovered the effects of resistance that the actor, director, and ensemble might face when creating a performance. What does this resistance look like?

**Discovering G's Background**In preparation for the role, I decided to research Izuka's muse for *Polaroid Stories*. She developed this story from real interviews she had with homeless people but used themes from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* to tell their stories. *Metamorphoses* is a collection of short narrative poems/stories based on Greek mythology to create a larger story. Izuka does the same thing with her work but writes a new narrative for the Greek mythological characters. The characters that appear in *Polaroid Stories* are homeless and drug addicts living on the street instead of Mount Olympus. Izuka uses historical Greek characters to inform her audience of the human condition instead of showing their traditional background. The "Gods" in this story do not have magical powers but do have power to control the way their choices affect their surroundings.

The first thing I decided to do was to read any myths I could find online on the Greek God Zeus, which was who my character G was based on and also named. The play is very poetic and I knew that if I read about the Greek mythology that I would have better insight of my character's choices. I wanted to find information on my primary relationships in the play with Eurydice, Philomel, Dionysus, Semele and Persephone. These were all characters that I would come in contact with during the play although there were other characters in the story. *Polaroid Stories* is written in a non-linear fashion and jumps from story to story to compose a story of morality. I found little information

online about the relationship of these characters and decided to speak with my director about research.

Professor Early had a different approach when it came to creating a character and establishing the world of the play. I told her how I wanted to research the background of my character Zeus and his relationship to these characters using Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. She suggested that instead of focusing on Izuka's influences that I focus on what is given by the narrative of the play. I have always been taught to do my character research and find out as much information as possible about the historical context or suggestions. Professor Early told me to read the play and interpret for myself G's story, because the audience may not be aware of the mythological references. She did not want her version of the play to be focused on the myth but the stories of the characters and for her audience to empathize with them. This was my first time having to negotiate what I usually do in my process for character development for the director. I decided to continue to read myths about my character to help me find the relationships, but I did put focus on the dialogue given in Izuka's play. I felt like I was doing a disservice to the playwright, because I felt like the Greek mythology was used in the text to inform me of my character.

This goes back to my idea about the negotiation the actor has to make with the director and playwright. I started to think about Izuka's vision and how she wanted the characters to be portrayed in the context of her story. The fact that Greek characters were used to name the characters made me want to connect my character development to the mythology. I also had to understand that Professor Early did not want me to ignore the context but be open to exploring and discovering new things from the actual play.

## **Ensemble Research for the Project**

In this production of *Polaroid Stories*, the cast had instructions to go find information about homeless people and drug abuse. My ensemble and I made a Google drive with information about the Greek myths and discussed interpretations of everyone's relationships. The research that I gave to the ensemble was mostly personal and based on experiences throughout my life. I have never been homeless or a drug addict, but I have witnessed domestic violence and know the affect it can have on someone. Laura Early mentioned in *The Louisville Cardinal's* review of *Polaroid Stories*: "the characters in 'Polaroid Stories' tell stories to get what they want and to survive a harsh economic and social environment. Their individual and collective stories reveal their shared humanity transforming the storyteller and the audience" (The Louisville Cardinal).

I took Professor Early's statement to heart in our rehearsal process. I felt like some of my cast members' experiences were priceless compared to any information that I could find on the internet. Some had experienced hardcore drug abuse and lived in impoverished environments. The information my ensemble shared about their personal experience with drugs and violence was very helpful to my thesis project. As someone who has never tried any type of drug or alcohol, the experience of others and research is all I had to rely on to get into character. This is normal for actors to not have experience with their character's lifestyle, but finding ways to portray it authentically onstage is the challenge.

One cast mate talked about his alcohol addiction and how hard it was to stop. He spoke about how it made him feel and the effects it had on his body. Another spoke about his drug habits of acid and what that does to the body. I shared my experience of living

with a drug dealer and someone knew him, because they purchased marijuana from him. Everything discussed in the rehearsal room remained private out of respect for the ensemble. Our rehearsals involved getting to know each other and to translate that connection onstage. In a show that is ensemble driven it is important to have a sense of camaraderie on and off the stage. Professor Early made sure that we realized the importance of telling these stories and having that communal sense of acceptance.

Professor Early discussed the stereotype that homeless people just wander around with nothing to do. She said that most homeless people have a set schedule of things to do and are never just sitting still. I know that their schedule may not be as organized as someone that is not homeless, but the premise of her saying this was to point out the urgency they have. The characters in this story all want something and are trying to achieve this goal. The goal, however, might be to score drugs, steal, have sex, or find love.

The sharing of information found and experienced helped us to create characters dealing with issues of prostitution and poverty as well as the loss of love. I was nervous about portraying drug use onstage because this was an experience I knew nothing about. As an actor there are different techniques to help you find any character and qualities about them. I knew that I wanted to fully transform into the role of G. I have a habit of being Konrad onstage and never truly transforming into the character. This is a negotiation that I have to personally go through for myself when developing a character. I always have an interpretation of the character as Konrad and not a transformation of Konrad into the character. In my close analysis of G, I discovered his association with drugs and alcohol through his interactions with other characters. The two primary

addictions my character faces are alcohol and crack. Although drug usage was an important quality to my character, it was only a minor worry compared to my biggest concern of portraying an older character onstage. I had never played an older role because of my energy and adolescent look. I knew that in order to be this character my physical body had to change as well as my voice. I knew that part of gaining the voice and the body movement for my character would come from critical analysis given by the contents in the story. As an actor, there are certain things you can focus on to develop a character based on everyday questions and qualities you normally do not think about.

### **Character Analysis**

My analysis of G (Zeus) was comprised of physical, mental, and moral values. G is short for God, which is understood with the name Zeus. Zeus was ruler of Mount Olympus, according to Greek mythology. Jesus is the son of God according to Christian beliefs and the Holy Bible. G (Zeus) can also be a pun on the name Jesus who was created from God and is a part of him. I did not include the Christian beliefs in my character development but focused on the Greek influences of my character to discover his other qualities. I found a collection of online myths pertaining to Zeus entitled *Olympian Gods* edited by Evangelia Hatztinidou. According to Greek myths, Zeus was male and loved women. He was actually a womanizer and cheated on his wife with multiple women at a time. This idea of the creator could also mean that he created everyone because of his sexual escapades. This connection to the mythology would inform me of G's relationships with women in *Polaroid Stories*. Izuka was humanizing the characters by stripping down their powers and also their level of status. Although these individuals are not powerful in the sense of magic, their lives are intertwined with

their mythological relationships. *Polaroid Stories* jumps around between the past, present, and future as well as showing specific moments like a picture (Polaroid) to tell the story. We are introduced to each God during specific moments set by the playwright. Semele is the first woman G is seen with in the play and also his first love interest. Semele is the mother of his child and also the first person to break his heart. His relationship with Semele is in the past and Eurydice's in the future. Eurydice is a young woman G counsels and helps find her confidence to face her current situation of an abusive relationship. G shares with her his experience of an abusive relationship to offer her salvation from her situation. Eurydice exists in the future after that relationship is over and is a symbol of a new future.

I had a conversation with the director as well as specific ensemble members that were in my scenes about the timeline of events. We decided how old my character was based on the relationships he had with Semele, Dionysus (Son), and Eurydice. I chose thirty-nine because of my character's son and relationship with other characters. Eurydice mentions how G is old throughout the play but complements how young he looks after getting to know him. This along with a conversation with Semele and Dionysus made me decide on the age of thirty nine. In the story, G states: "I ain't that old, baby, you better take another look" (Izuka 55). G considers the idea of being older but not too old to still pick up women. This is a perfect example of how the director, actor, and ensemble members negotiate to find a collective agreement. This agreement affects everyone in the production because everyone is used to construct the story.

G moves slowly and wears work boots that make him feel glued to the earth. He has heavy movements and never moves too fast because he has seen a lot of things and is

never scared. I decided that because of his multiple relationships with women that he is suffering from emotional trauma that has caused bi-polar disorder. He is very emotional and it can change with certain triggers from each female character that he contacts. He also wears a coat that he uses to store everything from drugs to oranges. He is very territorial with these belongings. The drugs he carries around are a symbol for addiction, for his loss of love, and sense of belonging. The drugs symbolize the misuse and abuse over the years that have affected his life. Like drugs, G was used countless times by others to escape their reality. G wants to belong to just one person but has to deal with the idea of just being filler for the time he is with someone. He wears a heavy chip on his shoulder about past experiences. The orange is a symbol of the sweet things in life that are taken for granted because no one wants to put forth the effort in discovering something new. G is an extrovert in the story and is always outspoken with new individuals. In my analysis of G, I felt like he did not finish school and it is obvious when he speaks to other characters. For instance, when he says: "I said, ain't you got no tongue" (Izuka 54).

His sentence structure shows his educational deficiency or it could be a cultural stigma influenced by his surroundings. This is an important example of how Laura did not want me to focus on outside sources but what the play is saying instead. If I focused on the mythology of him being powerful and smart then I would not notice these clues in the text. G is powerful in experience but not in a social class level that can be compared to the mythological history.

Throughout the play, G helps Semele find happiness through drugs, helps Philomel find her voice when it was taken away, and he helps Eurydice discover

confidence to stand up for herself while also searching for his own purpose. His first experience is with Semele and she does not want anything but to use him for her own benefit of drug use. He ends up broken-hearted and left with a son that he does not know how to take care of. G mentions, "I used to love this girl, and she and me, we had a son. I seen him one time before I go away"(Izuka 32). In my interpretation, I envisioned that one time meant a year, because Semele mentions later that her son was taken away from her. According to Greek mythology, Zeus bore his son Dionysus in his thigh when Semele tried to give birth. This goes back to the research that is not given by the playwright but part of the process the actor goes through to find out about his character. I do not know much about his relationship with his son, except that he abandoned his son Dionysus and continues to wander the world meeting other women (Birth of Dionysus, Hatztinidou ). This reinforces the idea that he was taking care of his son but then one day finally left. He is searching for forgiveness and also a fresh start, which can only be achieved in his eyes with a new woman. His next encounter is with Philomel, whom he gives a voice after her boyfriend cuts her tongue. We do not get to see this interaction but G tells the story to Eurydice about how some god helped her get her voice back (Izuka 54). G felt obligated to help her by giving her voice back. It also could be a metaphor for when he gives Eurydice the knife to kill Orpheus. In *Polaroid Stories*, Orpheus was Philomel's abusive boyfriend who later gets involved with Eurydice. Thus, the next girl he meets is Eurydice and she learns a lot about what love is through G (Hatztinidou). This is the first time we see a love interest on stage that is not abusive and one-sided. At first I thought that G was a player type and only wanted women for his sexual advantages. I gathered this information from the playwright and Greek mythology to



inform my character. I had to change this when I brought this interpretation to my director because she did not agree. I negotiated this quality of sexual need for a quality of concern and to help others in the play. These relationships all present G in a different light, which shows the type of person he is. G is shown in a submissive manner with Semele, a healer with Philomel, and a provider for Eurydice. These three women are all a part of his character arc of the story.

G faces many choices throughout the play, but he is in a position of turning his life around. Earlier in the play, we find G in an abusive relationship with Semele over drugs and their love life. The abuse does not come from G but from Semele and her drug addiction. She abuses G's love to get anything she wants out of him and if he does not she threatens to leave. Any issue that involves someone taking anything from my character upsets him because of his relationship with Semele. We see this in the other scene with Eurydice and she tries to take his belongings. He offers her an orange and she does not want it just like when he offers Semele his heart. G battles with this idea of what love is and helping others throughout the whole progression of the play. He offers everyone something throughout the play in hopes of gaining some type of connection. First, he offers his heart to Semele, his first true love, and is shattered by her drug addiction. The second thing he offered was a tongue or voice for Philomel when Orpheus cuts hers out. Philomel wanted to reclaim her voice from the violent relationship with her boyfriend. Lastly, he offered Eurydice a knife to free her from the pain of others and for protection in the real world. G goes from being vulnerable to being a motivator by the end of the play. The stories of these women are intertwined and G plays an important part in the resolution.

## G's G.O.T.E.

G.O.T. E. is an acronym the actor uses to approach character development and find a character's purpose. *Acting One* written by Robert Cohen describes the G.O.T.E technique that is widely used in most theatre programs. I still use this technique as a jumpstart to develop my character before the rehearsal process. The objectives listed in the acronym can be found in the text but usually change as you start to engage in performance in rehearsal. "G" is for Goal and usually is defined as what the character wants. "O" is for Obstacle and is usually the other person or thing that stands in your way of achieving your goal. "T" is for Tactics and are the ways or tools your character goes about to achieve his/her goal. "E" is for Expectations and the energy you put behind your goal and what you hope to achieve. G.O.T.E is a tool I can apply easily and quickly to any text for initial development (Cohen 61-63).

The goal was the first thing I looked for as I was reading the script and I discovered G's eternal need to help others. This goal was prevalent in every scene throughout the play and this was one thing the director agreed upon. G specifically wanted the love of others, mainly women, and to share his wisdom with everyone. I saw this in his interaction with Eurydice mainly because of his overall need to tell stories. G shares some wisdom about his past relationship with Semele to help Eurydice see that she needs to move on G's overall need to spread his knowledge was something I continued to think about throughout each scene and this would affect the way I speak during certain sections. The obstacle was the different people that G came in contact with. The first obstacle was Semele and her drug addiction to crack. G tries to give her his love and his heart but she refused to take it. He offers Eurydice his heart as well but

she did not want anything but materials. However, these women helped G by teaching me the importance of love and trust. Semele broke G's trust when she used him for her addiction. Eurydice showed G how to care for someone other than his self again.

Another obstacle was his mental state, which blocked him from helping others. In the final scene, G offers Eurydice a knife to protect herself from others who want to hurt her physically and mentally. The Dialogue for the scene explains itself:

G: Hey, holdup. What're you afraid of?

Eurydice: I ain't afraid.

G: What're you so afraid of?

Eurydice: I ain't afraid of nothing.

G: That ain't true. I know it ain't. cause it ain't about love. It ain't even about that you hear what I'm saying? Ain't about nothing 'cept getting out alive.

(Takes knife out) Here.

Eurydice: I don't want that . I don't want that.

G: Girl, ain't nowhere left to run, ain't nowhere left to go. Here, take it go on--- take it.

(Eurydice takes the knife from G) (Izuka 79)

The knife symbolizes that she has to stand up and fight for herself one day. In the final moment, Eurydice is confused and G calms her down to offer her the knife. She knows that she has to kill Orpheus her boyfriend because he is not good for her. Death is the only thing that can end their relationship and the torment he has caused in her life. An obstacle that held G back from helping others was released once he got to know Eurydice. These obstacles link with each other as well as created solutions.

Many actors evaluate the needs of their character from scene to scene, using tactics within the imaginary world of the play to reach for a specific goal. Cohen explains that the actor must always have expectations rather than playing the end result. Even if the actor knows their character falls short of their goal, it should be eagerly pursued to bring the scene to life (Cohen 53-54). The actor still has the option of playing these tactics because the character in that moment does not know the outcome. A perfect example is my scene with Semele, I used charm, evasion, and negotiation (as a tactic) to get her mind off of the drugs (Izuka 29-31). I tried to charm my partner on stage into giving me a hug and when she asked me about the drugs I tried to ignore the question. I used the tactics that made her give me a hug, which resulted in her sweet-talking me into giving her the drugs. I did not achieve my objective of receiving love but my partner's tactics worked so she did get the drugs. This is an example of how an actor may not achieve his goals onstage. The tactics can sometimes change during a rehearsal and performance so the actor must be open to these opportunities. This is part of the artistic negotiation between an actor and his partner onstage. Just because we perform something one night does not mean it is going to be the same every performance.

This is a perfect segue into expectations and how you have to be open although you should know exactly what you want to achieve. It is different from the goal because it is almost like knowing the final result of an action. As an actor, I cannot play the end result because my character does not know the response. In my scene with Eurydice, I expect her to stay with me forever although I the actor know it is not going to happen. I have to still play my goals through tactics to overcome my obstacles to reach my expectations. G wants Eurydice to stay because he is now a changed person because of

their interactions. By the end of the play, my character does not achieve his goal because he is still lonely, but I cannot play that onstage.

I had to apply all of this information with the techniques I have learned for acting while remaining open to discoveries in rehearsal. This is the beginning stages of bookwork that the actor brings to rehearsal to play with for the director. The director will then pick and choose what the actor can keep for the final rehearsal. The information the actor provides has to make sense to the story and be clear for an audience to understand. That is why the director is important in the process of creating a performance. The playwright has put the blueprint out there for the actor to use, but the director makes sure that it is consistent to what the playwright wanted.

### **Training & Rehearsal Discoveries**

My training has consisted of a lot of Stanislavski, Meisner, and Cohen techniques. But none would help me with this process like Commedia Dell'Arte and Improv. Commedia Dell'Arte is an Italian form of theatre comprised of mask work and improvisation. The actors usually develop scenarios that are open for discovery as well as an array of characters. Commedia has a long list of stock characters and archetypes that helped me create G. I studied this technique in my graduate movement class under Professor Erin Crites. I also attended her alma mater Dell'Arte in California for a Summer Intensive in Commedia Training. This training opened my eyes to discovery and how to approach characters with an open template. *Commedia Dell'Arte: An Actor's Handbook* by John Rudlin was a great source during my thesis performance as well as writing.

I used a blend of stock characters to create G that included Dottore, The Lovers, and Capitano. These characters are archetypes for creating commedia scenarios and are different per performance. Commedia is usually a masked art form but I used these characters to create G's "mask". I excelled in all of my Commedia training and I knew I could use this technique to play older. The characters sometimes played with substances of alcohol and drug abuse but usually made the performance larger than life. I knew that if I could do it with a commedia mask then I could scale it down for an unmasked performance.

Dottore is classified as an old bachelor or widower, which was perfect for G. Another example is when G says "now that's the hard truth. I like a woman who tells the truth. you always tell a man the truth" (Izuka 56)? We see that G has an infatuation with finding a new woman and his bachelor tendencies. Capitano is also known to talk a lot about himself and sometimes about nothing. Eurydice mentions how she does not believe anything G says which is a trait I used from Capitano (Rudlin 119-122). These are specific characteristics I used to develop G from the textual analysis I found in the story. Dottore is known to be stingy with his things because he does not have any money. G does not have any money but when he does offer no one takes it. I only used a few characteristics of Dottore but they helped me embody the character G. Dottore's character walk is usually slow and hunched over, which informed my physical body for G (Rudlin 91-93).

The Lovers are usually very emotional about whatever is going on in their lives. G goes through a rollercoaster of emotions and we see him switch quickly throughout his scenes. The lovers can easily go from being very happy to very mad very quickly and this

is something that influenced my choice of behavior. I also adopted The Lovers archetypal need because of their drive for love and need for the plot to function (Rudlin 106-08). If G's quest for love and sense of belonging were not there to help the other characters, there would be no resolution. The Lovers also deal with jealousy and fidelity, which is something G, struggles with throughout the play with his relationships.

Like Captiano's characteristics of being loud and profound in his speech, G has a way of speaking wisdom to others he comes in contact with which goes back to a reference I made earlier about his need to share his experience. Capitano is usually grounded in his stance, which is where I tried to hold my weight when I was on stage. I made sure my voice had a deep resonance that almost echoed to the audience. Capitano, like G, is always in search of love and the fellowship of others but never seems to find it. Capitano was a good template of informing me how my character moves in the world of the play.

There are many Commedia archetypes, but I only used a few to achieve the physical quality of G. I also used element work that was developed in my Commedia training. The element work consisted of using the four different elements—earth, water, fire, and air—to create movement. I used earth to inform my body of G, because I felt earth was grounded and moved slowly. Anytime I moved onstage as G I knew specifically where I was going. This was just another exercise I learned during my intensive at Dell'Arte.

Commedia is similar to improvisation, because of the open exploration and control an actor has while onstage. The only difference is that Commedia uses masks and usually is a pre-planned scenario. I have learned that Improvisation is a great tool for

actors to have when developing characters. Through improvisation the actor can create a character and scenario organically for the audience. In my training at Second City in Chicago, I learned how to let go and just act. As an actor, we always want to analyze and over think different character choices. In my training, I discovered that the actor should let the audience in on whatever you are feeling onstage. This will result in a unique performance that the audience will experience with the actor in the world of the play.

Improvisation, or improv as it is commonly called, helped create an ensemble for us in rehearsal because of the games we played. The improv games taught us a lot about who were the leaders and the followers in the ensemble. It also showed us how to deal with pressure and to keep the energy of the show going no matter what happens. Sometimes actors forget that they are playing real characters that are human and can take time to engage in conversations or mundane activities. An actor usually thinks they have to keep talking or moving onstage when they can really just stand and deliver. Professor Early emphasized to me the importance of just being in the space and losing the desire to move the whole time. We had to negotiate my blocking because I wanted to move on certain lines when she wanted me to stand. The actor saying the line can sometimes be just enough to hold the audience's attention.

Improvisation is all about conversation and language but sometimes uses physical engagement to compose stories for audiences to see. Improv relies heavily on storytelling and making sure the audience follows the sequence of events. I kept this influence of telling a story when I did both of my monologues and let the language inform the audience of my emotions. My physical gesture work was developed to help me transform into G. I had a small gesture that when performed would help me stay in character. That



gesture was a scratch on my neck, which was a result of drug abuse and the desire for more. The audience had no idea that his gesture was used to help me transform physically into the world of the play.

Finding G was not an easy task and called for me to be open to working with an ensemble. The ensemble was comprised of not only the other cast members but the director and the playwright. The playwright was not there physically but was actively participating through the script. I could use all of the methods I learned in my acting career but had to choose what was best for this process. This process caught me off guard with how I got the role but influenced my decision to use improvisational techniques for my process. In my last chapter, I will focus on the final performance and what I would do differently as well as my goals for after the program.

<sup>6</sup>*G: Story of a Man.....and how he changed into something else and how the old scars and they grew new smooth ones.*

### **Overall Performance of the Show**

It was the week of our final performance, and I was in dress rehearsal trying to mentally prepare myself for the role. All of the creative brainstorming and playing would finally be applied to the actual performance. The first would be to put my boots on every night and warm up with them so I could feel the weight of my character's walk. I would also listen to "Say Something" by The Great Big World for my scene with Paula Lockhart, who played both Persephone and Semele. This song helped me get into the emotional state for every scene because of the hurt the song described about a one-sided relationship. My full ensemble did not want to warm up as a group, but the men's dressing room always had certain rituals we would do. We would do a group cipher and take pictures to keep the energy up.

During one of the dress rehearsals, I was asked to blacken my tooth with makeup and it changed my character's voice dramatically. The tooth putty made me have a southern accent, which changed G's voice. My director immediately asked for them to change the tooth to just brown stains on my teeth.

The first two nights went by quickly and of course the audience's reaction was different every night. My family decided to come on the third night and for some reason

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<sup>6</sup> Izuka, Naomi. *Polaroid Stories*. 28-31, 54-56, 74-79.

Published 1997 by Dramatic Publishing Company. Print

my scene with Eurydice (played by Mia Rocchio) was different. I realized during the run that the best place to look is in my partner's eyes and that night my partner was not making eye contact. I felt like I had grown accustomed to different emotional patterns and did not continue to be present with my partner. This was my thesis role. I put a lot of pressure on myself to make each performance the best, failing to think about how it would affect my cast members. I took a step back the next night to reclaim my nerves and I discussed how to improve the rest of the run with my partner onstage. The next night went great and that small adjustment made a difference in all of my scenes.

The ensemble was very supportive in anything that happened onstage and offstage. The artist has to be able to control their feelings and emotions and not let outside influences change their energy. I have learned in the process that positive energy can be more helpful than negative energy. I was happy with the success of the show and happy that I had the opportunity to work with a Laura Early. Her enthusiasm and direction changed my view of how I approach my work. She did not necessarily take away my expression but improved it with her overall vision of the show. She reminded me that in any good theatre the ensemble works together to create a good show. My ensemble worked well together to create art and it was because no one was selfish.

### **Pros and Cons of G**

G has been more of a challenge than any other role I have ever had. I do feel like I made some huge strides but also fell into some old habits. I got most of my feedback from peers and professors about the show. My performance professor raved about my creation and character work of G. He was aware that G was a stretch from my normal character type but felt like I gave a great performance. He also commented on my past

critique of seeing Konrad in every role. My professors often criticized me about not completely transforming and letting my personal habits affect the character onstage. They felt like my personal habits were very far removed from my performance. Crystian Wiltshire, a colleague of mine, observed that my performance of G had multiple emotional levels and felt like my work on the character was present onstage and evident in my performance. This was great feedback because that was one of my number one concerns as I was preparing for the role. This thesis role was the biggest role in my career and I wanted to go out with top performance.

My director was also aware of this role being a stretch for me, but she mentioned in my review that she believed that I could do it. She was very pleased with my performance although she mentioned that she wanted more age to be seen onstage. She felt like I brought that age to rehearsal, but it was not always clear during the performance week. I can agree with her critique, because I felt like my vocal did not match my physical body. My body told my age more than my vocal because my voice usually comes from my head and not my chest. If I had to do this process over again I would work more on using my chest resonators than my mouth box and head voice.

In the end, I wish I had taken more notes in my journal and stayed organized with my school work at the time. These were outside factors that affected my writing portion of the thesis and would have made my process a little easier. I now understand how taking on too many obligations can hinder anything that you do. This has been a redundant factor in my work since I have been in the department. I know part of this is because I make it hard on myself and that I do not do my best until I am under a lot of pressure. I also tend to give more attention to what I want to do rather than what I need to

do. I will continue to challenge myself to notice when I am taking on too many things. This will be something that can make or break my career if I do not work on it now.

As an artist, there is always this little idea about using your art to educate or to freely express yourself. I challenged myself to approach this role with a more expressive sense of just exploring. This role was for me to explore what it means to be someone who is addicted to drugs and living in impoverished conditions. I have always believed that actions speak louder than words. Thus, my acting is my way of putting action behind words to educate others. Plays engage audiences in a way that lectures and books cannot. The exchange between actor and audience is what makes it so powerful for me, and why I pursued it for a career.

### **To Negotiate or Not To Negotiate**

Throughout this whole thesis, I have been discussing what it means to negotiate as an artist and what the artist has to give up. The fact is that any artist will have to work with other artists to create art. I am an artist because I choose not to limit myself to just one thing. I like the freedom to pick and choose what I want to do whether it is acting, directing, or writing. These are things that most artists do to express themselves. I used to always wonder how my art could evoke change and what it can do for someone or some issue. I have always liked Du Bois's quote: "What is art if not propaganda?" (Du Bois, 29). This quote speaks volumes to what art can do and could have only been powerful with the help of others.

Others can be actors, directors, or writers but the only way for art to survive is through collaboration. This collaboration cannot be done if an artist is resistant to the overall vision of a project. The artist should be open to change and evolution of a single

idea in their work. They are welcome to stick with one idea, but it is wasteful if one is not always be aware of other options that can lead to growth or discovery.

The artist has to be ready and willing to negotiate in order to succeed in this field. As an actor, your whole reason behind auditioning is to work with a director who is working with a playwright to bring a play to life. If the director does not like your choice, it is not personal. It just means you are not right for the job or the specific project. I had to learn that different situations in life can alter your plans and you have to be open to accept anything. I cannot be selfish and think that my opinion is the only thing that matters. I also cannot refuse to be a team player, because that will just slow down the creative process. I have realized that the artist does win when he negotiates with his ensemble to complete a project.

RGHGTGPEGU

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